

The Mutant Land:

How the Island Krakoa Dictates the Mutant Society in *House of X*

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Abstract: From an ecocritical standpoint, the *House of X* is an original concept, particularly in the way that Krakoa (the environment) and mutants (the population) interact. This story challenges popular ecocritical theory by creating an environment that dictates the materials and resources available to the mutants rather than existing as a passive backdrop that the population can conserve or ravage as it sees fit. Although *House of X* focuses on how mutants in Marvel Comics establish their own society and become recognized as a sovereign nation, their success in doing so is completely reliant on Krakoa, the island where they establish their statehood. Moreover, the mutants who work to establish this new society defy traditional gender associations both as a part of and apart from nature. These factors make *House of X* stand out among other superhero comics in its depictions of the relationship between Krakoa and its population and the representations of gender within this environment.

Keywords: *House of X*; Mutants; ecocriticism; gender; comics; X-Men

Since their first issue, the *X-Men* comics have served as an allegory for civil rights. In over fifty years of publication, the X-Men have moved from solely illuminating issues of race in America to exploring issues concerning LGBTQ+ rights and religious tolerance (Shyminski 2006, Lund 2015). The team has a rogues' gallery of enemies such as Bolivar Trask, William Stryker, or Donald Peirce who want to eradicate mutantkind through some sort of religious- or politically-based genetic cleansing. Although some mutants find sanctuary in Charles Xavier's (and subsequently the Jean Grey) School for Gifted Youngsters, these mutants live in constant fear of being persecuted outside of the school because they are different from the rest of society. Echoing the ideas of activists such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and to a lesser degree, W.E.B. DuBois, some X-Men writers have created situations where some mutants create their own societies separate from humans. At different points in the X-Men's history, places such as Asteroid M and the Savage Land have been designated as mutant sanctuaries representing small sects of mutantkind. 2019's *House of X* differs in that it actually establishes a sovereign mutant nation that is completely separate from and unpopulated by humans on the island of Krakoa. This migration to Krakoa represents a grand turning point for mutants in Marvel, for this is the first time that mutants are no longer subject to a society created

by humans. Instead, mutants birth their own separate society and all of its trappings. Because Krakoa has its own will, the mutants who reside there must live as a part of the island and apart from the island because the two states are intertwined.

For the mutants of Marvel Comics, the environment of the island of Krakoa is paramount in determining how its population flourishes or withers in *House of X*. Through an ecocritical lens, one can see how, in the *House of X* storyline, Krakoa (the environment) and mutants (the population) interact. The Krakoan environment dictates the materials and resources available to the mutants rather than existing as a passive backdrop that the mutant population can cultivate, conserve, or ravage as it sees fit. Although *House of X* focuses on how mutants in Marvel Comics establish their own society and become recognized as a sovereign nation on Krakoa, their success in doing so is completely reliant on Krakoa, the island where they establish their statehood. To a lesser extent, Krakoa also helps mutants challenge the patriarchy of human societies by establishing a mutant community based on an individual's ability as a part of and apart from nature. These factors make *House of X* memorable among other superhero comics in its depictions of the relationship between Krakoa and its population, as well as the representations of gender within this environment.

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The Origin of Krakoa

Giant Sized X-Men #1 is a seminal issue for comic book fans because it marks so many indelible “firsts” in the X-Men history. This issue includes the first appearance of Colossus, Nightcrawler, Thunderbird, and Storm, most of whom have been immortalized to the general public in cartoons and cinema. It is also the first issue where Banshee and Wolverine join the team. Lesser known, though, is the enemy that these X-Men fight in the issue—the mutant island of Krakoa. Although Krakoa has not been developed much compared to other X-Men villains such as Magneto, Mister Sinister, or Apocalypse, it does serve as the cornerstone of the *House of X* storyline.

When first introduced in *Giant Sized X-Men #1* in 1975, Krakoa was an enigma to the X-Men. In this issue, writer Len Wein and artist Dave Cockrum tell the story in four parts. Parts I and II show Xavier recruiting a new mutant team for a mission: to rescue three of the original X-Men from a super powerful mutant on the island of Krakoa. In Part III, the X-Men begin to experience mysterious phenomena on the island. First, while walking through a jungle on the island, Cyclops and Thunderbird are ensnared by giant vines. Struggling, Thunderbird exclaims, “The vines—They’re alive—!!” (24) A couple of pages later, Storm (Ororo) and Colossus are almost crushed by a landslide of rocks. Fleeing the scene, Colossus observes, “This landslide cannot be outrun, Ororo! It has changed direction to follow us!” (26). At the end of Part III, the X-Men realize that, as Angel asserts: “We came to the island to look for a mutant...but the mutant is the island itself! (29).

Part IV then begins with a narrative history of Krakoa, explaining how it gained its sentience:

The sun-burst brilliance of an early atomic test... whose unseen radiation permeated every living organism here [on Krakoa]...until they grew linked in a colony intelligence that gave the island a life of its own...[B]ut Krakoa grew hungry then...a hunger barely appeased when the X-men arrived upon the scene...Krakoa fed upon their mutant energies and

became hungrier still...Thus, it released one X-Man and sent him forth to find more food...”

(Wein and Cockrum, 30)

In this passage, the reader sees that Krakoa is not a simple organism that needs to feed but is instead intelligent enough to set a trap for the X-Men by releasing one of them to attract more. Its sentience is then corporealized in a distorted, cthulhu-esque mound of rock and fauna that emerges from the island’s terrain. Here it is revealed that the collective intellect of Krakoa’s fauna and flora enables it to control every aspect of its wildlife and environment. It is only through the combined power of all of the X-Men fighting against it physically—and Professor Xavier fighting it psychically that the X-Men defeat Krakoa and escape. In this fight, the island psychically defeats Xavier (the most powerful telepath in the world) and almost kills all of the other X-Men. After *Giant Sized X-Men #1*, Krakoa does not function as a major character in the Marvel Universe, only making a handful of cameos, many of which are actually revealed to be clones or offspring of Krakoa rather than the original creature.

It is not until 2019’s *House of X* that Krakoa becomes a literal and figurative cornerstone for the X-Men. *House of X* and *Powers of X* are two miniseries written concurrently to tell the same story from different timelines.¹ They show how Charles Xavier (leader and founder of the X-Men) has laid the groundwork to create a sanctuary country populated entirely by mutants since the year that he founded the X-Men. Series’ creators, writer Jonathan Hickman and artists Pepe Larraz and R. B. Silva, show numerous flashbacks of Xavier visiting Krakoa in the past decade, attempting to understand it, communicate with it, and negotiate with it to become this mutant sanctuary. Reading *House of X* and subsequent X-titles through an ecological lens, it quickly becomes apparent that almost every major aspect of the mutant society of Krakoa is either directly or indirectly connected to the environment that Krakoa provides for that society. Evaluating the importance of the environment and ecosystem in *House of X*, the reader sees that even though Xavier has established the mutant society on Krakoa, the

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island itself actually *controls* all of the major aspects of that society. This controlling factor makes it an integral part of the narrative—arguably, as much a part of the narrative as the mutants (other than Krakoa) themselves, making ecocriticism a uniquely effective tool for analyzing the symbiotic relationship between man- (or in this case mutant-) kind in this story.

Simply stated, ecocriticism concerns itself with studying “the relationship between nature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996). However, ecocritics Erin James and Eric Morel expand this definition, demonstrating the ways that environments contribute to a story’s narrative: “Ecocritic[al] considerations of the more-than-human world and post human environments have much to add to recent narratological analyses of representations of the nonhuman in narratives. Narrative theorists have long argued that, while not every narrator is human, all narrators by necessity have human characteristics” (James and Morel). James and Morel point out that ecocriticism recognizes non-human elements and entities that claim personage in a story.² Whereas this likeness does coincide with the idea that narratological vehicles maintain human characteristics, the same cannot be said for Krakoa which, despite its sentience and impact on the narrative, demonstrates almost no human characteristics. The mutants who inhabit Krakoa rely on it for more than just sustenance and materials typically taken from an environment; they also rely on Krakoa for their language, shelter, and transportation, making it a driving force of the *House of X* narrative.

Krakoa’s Purpose

If one accepts Lawrence Buell’s claims that ecocriticism has come in three waves, and that the last two of these waves have focused on social justice and postcolonial critique, then the methods by which an ecocritical lens can be applied to *House of X* become rather obvious (Buell 2001). In *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, however, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley warn that “ecocriticism is particularly vulnerable to naturalizing dominant forms of environmental discourses, partic-

ularly those that do not fundamentally engage with questions of difference, powers, and privilege” (DeLoughrey and Handley 2001). Significantly, *House of X* dedicates many panels and a great deal of space to addressing differences, powers, and privilege by depicting the formation of a new government on Krakoa that is centrally sensitive to these factors. Unlike many other texts that focus on environmentalism and ecosystems, Jonathan Hickman makes the environment itself a determining force dictating power and privilege in how it cooperates with the mutant society.

Clearly, the idea of mutants expatriating themselves to create a society made by and for their race meets both of Buell’s criteria. Unlike previous X-Men story arcs that focus on the persecution and genocide of mutants in a human world, *House of X* offers insight into how mutants establish their own society apart from humanity.³ Of course, the mutants’ colonization of a deserted island *should* have repercussions. They *should* impact the environment, and the environment should impact them. In addition, Markka Lehtimäki suggests that in any environment, humans (and by extension, mutants) “shape and are shaped by their engagement in the natural world” (Lehtimäki 2013). In most cases, people attempt to bend the environment to their will, farming it for material and mining it for resources. “Deep ecology” critics, however, feel that humans should appreciate nature for its inherent value rather than solely for what it can provide (Naess 1989). Uniquely, *House of X* creates circumstances in which it is impossible for Krakoa’s mutant inhabitants to manipulate or exploit the environment because Krakoa maintains complete control over its environment, willingly providing the mutants with materials and resources. In the twelve issues of *House of X* and in subsequent titles, Hickman and other writers show how mutants declare independence through exclusive trade, create laws and punishment, establish mass transit routes, identify a national language, and negotiate property rights—none of which would be possible without the island of Krakoa providing the means and/or permitting them to do so.

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Trade and Sovereignty

In the first issue of *House of X*, Xavier arranges a meeting between human ambassadors from the United Nations and mutant ambassadors from Krakoa to explain the society that the mutants have created. This meeting also serves as a step toward the world's recognition of Krakoa as its own nation. As the human ambassadors wait for the meeting to begin, they discuss a proposal that Charles Xavier has given them. This proposal states that in exchange for its sovereignty, the mutants of Krakoa are willing to provide allied countries access to the island's drugs. Although readers are not privy to the proposal, the human ambassadors divulge what the drugs can do: "A drug that extends human life five years, another that prevents disease of the mind and a third that is the most effective, adaptive antibiotic the world has ever seen..." (*House of X #1*). A subsequent splash page in the same issue further explains that these drugs are actually flowers grown exclusively on and by Krakoa. This page explains that "The mutant island of Krakoa is not just home of mutants and seat of their nation-state, it is also the only known producer of the primary economic resources of the mutant nation." Beneath this explanation, the page lists the three previously mentioned "flowers" under the category "for humans." Later, the story reveals that the United Nations has voted to recognize Krakoa as a sovereign nation, but that some countries have rejected the trade of Krakoa's flowers because of political or ideological beliefs.

Whereas science fiction series such as *Dune* have made good use of the premise that a foreign land may produce resources that give one species economic power over another, *House of X* uniquely requires the land itself to be a willing participant in the production of said resources. There is nothing in the text to suggest that the mutants must actually farm the flowers. Contrarily, the text suggests that Krakoa produces the flowers at will and without limit. This willfulness means that Krakoa, not the mutants inhabiting it, controls the trade, economy, and diplo-

macy of the burgeoning mutant nation. While many science fiction stories revolve around the necessity of creatures working the land—either farming, mining, or digging for resources—*House of X* suggests in its panels that Krakoa produces its flowers without any cultivation or farming. Given Krakoa's power level as a mutant (as shown in *Giant Sized X-Men #1*), it would be nigh impossible for the mutants to force it to produce anything against its will. As such, if Krakoa were to decide to cease production of its indigenous flowers, the mutants inhabiting it would be unable to farm those resources, leaving them without their primary export and crippling their economy.

Law and Punishment

House of X spends almost an entire issue demonstrating the ways that the new mutant nation establishes laws, rules, and punishments apart from those governing humanity. Rather than looking at topics of social justice and postcolonialism as they apply to mutants in the human world, *House of X* allows the reader to observe them contained entirely within the shores of Krakoa. In doing so, the story reveals Krakoa's impact on mutant law, and, conversely, the mutants' dependency on Krakoa to enforce those laws.

After Charles Xavier establishes a "Quiet Council" of mutants to govern Krakoa, he proposes the concept of laws of the people.⁴ After pages of debate and in Orwellian fashion, the Quiet Council creates three principle laws: 1) Make more mutants, 2) Murder no man, and 3) Respect this sacred land [Krakoa]. The first law dictates that any mutant who is killed or has been killed unnaturally is resurrected by mutants called "The Five," who possess the collective power to do so. The second law applies (literally) to humans (*Homo sapiens*) with the caveat that all mutants who commit crimes outside of Krakoa are to be extradited and tried by the Quiet Council because human jurors do not constitute a jury of "peers." The third law is self-evident. As these rules are established, the Quiet Council tries its first case against a quasi-feral mutant named Sabertooth. While Sabertooth has killed thousands of humans and mutants alike without re-

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morse, this particular trial involves the recent murders of human soldiers when his team's orders were clear: "no casualties." As Sabertooth is being tried, he demonstrates his lack of remorse once more by swearing that he will kill the next three generations of the Quiet Council's members to guarantee that their bloodline becomes extinct.

The Quiet Council unanimously finds Sabertooth guilty but recognizes a problem. As Professor X points out, if it sentences him to death, then, by its own first law, it must order his resurrection. The Council has previously declared that Krakoa does not and will not harbor any prisons. Specifically, this declaration means that the Quiet Council will not authorize the construction of any prisons on Krakoa—and not that the island itself is intolerant to their presence. The Council also recognizes that it cannot send Sabertooth back among the humans for fear that he will kill humans or that humans will kill him; Sabertooth literally declares the former ultimatum earlier in the story. After presenting these conundrums to the members of the Council, Xavier instructs Cypher to ask Krakoa to carry out an unstated punishment, demonstrating that Xavier had already come to an agreement with Krakoa about how mutants found guilty of capital crimes should be punished.

In response to this unofficial sentence, vines shoot out of an abyss leading into Krakoa's depths—a scene reminiscent of its previous attempts at trapping Cyclops and Thunderbird in its first appearance. These vines wrap around Sabertooth and pull him into the void, where he will be in "Stasis—deep inside Krakoa. Alive but immobile—aware but unable to act on it..." (*House of X #6*). Xavier does not explain what administers this stasis, but by Krakoa's very nature, the reader can assume that something among the flora and fauna of its ecosystem is responsible. The Council's decision is only made enforceable because Krakoa chooses to detain Sabertooth with its vines, pull him into his abyss, and sedate him indefinitely with its toxins. Furthermore, although Xavier explains that Sabertooth's sentence is "forever...for that is how long mutant law lasts" or until the Council

sees fit to release him, Krakoa is the only member of the Council that can actually release Sabertooth from stasis. There is no evidence suggesting that any other member of the Quiet Council could get Krakoa to imprison or release him in opposition to its own will.

Transportation

At the beginning of *House of X*, Hickam and Larraz show panels of X-Men planting strange, purple flowers in the soil of Westchester, New York; Washington, D.C.; the Savage Land; Jerusalem; the Earth's moon; and Mars. On the following page, the narrative box indicates the present with the word "Now," and the panel behind it shows that the flower planted in Washington, D.C. has bloomed into a giant floral habitat that has consumed an entire building. Inside that habitat, two X-Men, Stepford Cuckoos Esme and Sophia, emerge from a glowing, purple gateway encased in flora (*House of X #1*). A few pages later, the reader sees the X-Man Marvel Girl leading mutant children through the gateway in Westchester to Krakoa. A young mutant asks her if anyone can travel through the gateway, to which Marvel Girl replies, "No. Not everyone. Any mutant can, of course. Krakoa recognizes its own. But anyone or anything that isn't a mutant must be accompanied by one—and even then we have to ask permission. You see, Krakoa is very protective, and it's always important to have good manners." Marvel Girl's explanation reinforces the assumption that the island itself controls who can and cannot enter the gateways. In a subsequent spin-off title, *The Marauders*, Krakoa denies mutant and X-Man Kitty Pryde entry through the gateway, proving that it will deny mutants as well as humans without explanation if it so chooses, and that transportation to and from Krakoa is purely at the island's discretion.

House of X #1 also suggests that Krakoa's gateways are somewhat arbitrary by implying that they may not go to the same place every time. When a human ambassador asks one of the Stepford Cuckoos,⁵ "How do you know which door leads where?" the Cuckoo replies, "I won't lie, at first it was easy to

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get turned around. Familiarity helps, but just to be safe, we asked Krakoa to grow some signs so no one would lose their way.” The Cuckoo’s confusion affirms the disorienting nature of the transportation gateways and hints at how inconsistent they may be. One is left to wonder if Krakoa itself actually determines which gate a mutant will travel to once they enter.

Through this exchange, Johnathan Hickman depicts Krakoa not only as the gateway that enables mutants to travel across the world and through space, but also as the arbiter of who can use these gateways, whether mutant or not. Moreover, it is implied that Krakoa also determines the mutants’ destinations once they pass through the gates. Like the nation’s trade and commerce systems, Krakoa—and not its inhabitants—facilitates, determines, and maintains the mutant’s mass transportation and travel systems.

Language

Perhaps the most unique aspect of *House of X* is the island of Krakoa’s contribution to the language of the nation. In *Giant Sized X-Men #1*, the X-Men can clearly understand Krakoa, which is speaking English. This event, however, was later retconned in *X-Men: Deadly Genesis* (2005-2006), where author Ed Brubaker has Professor Xavier explain that he psychically modified the X-Men’s memories of fighting Krakoa for the first time, making them think that they heard the island speaking English, when, in fact, they did not comprehend its language. In doing so, Brubaker establishes that Krakoa does have its own language, but that humans and most mutants simply cannot comprehend it.

In the aforementioned incident from *House of X* where the Cuckoo tells the human ambassador that the mutants asked Krakoa to grow signs on the gateways, she points to a cluster of symbols over the gate. The ambassador asks, “Am I supposed to be able to read that?” to which the Cuckoo replies, “Of course not. It says nothing. It’s gibberish” (*House of X #1*). In the next panel, Quiet Council member Mag-

neto explains, “Well, it’s certainly not Russian, English, French or Chinese...but it is a language. Ours. It’s Krakoaan, and every mutant who lives among us has it telepathically imprinted in their cerebral cortex the day they arrive.”

The story later reveals that the Krakoaan language is not actually the language that the island itself “speaks.” This revelation is unearthed in *Powers of X #4* during a flashback sequence when Professor Xavier takes the mutant Cypher to Krakoa for the first time. Cypher’s mutant ability enables him to understand and communicate in any language after even very brief exposure to it. When Krakoa “speaks,” its speech bubble is filled with squiggly lines, confirming its language’s incomprehensible nature. Cypher analyzes the language, claiming, “No fricatives, which makes sense, but the layering is dense...more than I would normally expect. I’m picking it up, but I need more.” This panel illuminates how complicated and seemingly unintelligible Krakoa’s language is, as even Cypher’s powers do not even permit him to understand the language immediately. Eventually, Cypher does gain a broad understanding of what Krakoa is communicating, and the scene ends with Professor Xavier tasking Cypher with creating a new language based on the island’s own “tongue.” Even with his mutant power, Cypher tells Xavier that the task is “ambitious” and that the phonology and syntax will be complicated, adding, “the ecosystem is an unknown, so that’ll be tricky.” This panel suggests that the ecosystem of Krakoa itself is a part of its language.

The reader knows that Cypher is successful in creating a language (which shall be referred to as the “mutant Krakoaan” language) based on the language that Krakoa “speaks” (or at least expresses in some dialectical form), as the mutant Krakoaan’s symbols can be seen in *House of X #1* when the Cuckoo tells the ambassador that the sign over the gateway is “gibberish.” Eventually, Marvel would produce a decoder for the mutant Krakoaan language, but this decoder does not explain anything about the language; it only shows the phenomes that each sym-

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bol represents. Using the Krakoan decoder shown in *House of X #3*, one can see that, in fact, the Cuckoo is correct, as the literal translation of the symbols over the gate is “G·A·L·M.” The incomprehensible nature of Krakoa’s language is further evidenced by a page of notes in *House of X #3*: “It’s important to note that [mutant] Krakoan is a manufactured language and not the native language of Krakoa the living mutant island. The language of Krakoa is untranslatable, and almost all human/mutant brains are incapable of comprehending it. The only known exception is Cypher.” This quote shows that although the island has its own language, Cypher created the mutant Krakoan language to be penetrable (yet still incredibly difficult to learn) for the average mutant.

Witnessing the challenges of teaching the language to all the mutants, Xavier instead chooses to psychically implant it into the minds of all of the mutants who live there. Still, without Krakoa and its language—which is undoubtedly intertwined with its ecosystem—Cypher would not have the foundation for a language exclusive to mutants.

Property and Property Rights

The mutant population’s “habitats” are not traditional brick and mortar; their frames and infrastructures are actually made from bloomed flowers that Krakoa produces—flowers that can seemingly flourish in any environment, as demonstrated by the habitats that it creates on the Earth’s moon and on Mars. Moreover, these habitats seem capable of providing an atmosphere within them that is suitable for humans and mutants to live. These habitats serve many functions for the inhabitants of Krakoa, from living quarters and businesses to training facilities and transit stations. All of these habitats have names, and some of these names reflect the people who live in or run a business in the habitat. For example, the “House of Summers” hosts Scott Summers (Cyclops) and his family members from Earth 616 (the main earth and timeline of Marvel Comics) and other Earths, while “Bar Sinister” is a tavern/ lounge run by Mr. Sinister. Despite the association between some mutants’

names and the habitats that they populate, however, the notion of owning or controlling property on Krakoa is complicated. Because these habitats are a part of or come from Krakoa’s ecosystem, they are considered a part of Krakoa, which means that the island maintains ownership of all of its habitats, including annexed locations that are not physically on the island. The text also suggests that, through the teleportation gates, Krakoa can choose to grow or wither the flowers that create or destroy these environments at will, regardless of whether they are on the island or not.

This idea of property rights is addressed in *House of X #6* when the Quiet Council is discussing the political matters that need to be addressed. One council member, Sabastian Shaw, states, “Property rights. Wealth. Currency. A few of the things man clearly got right. I have quite a few ide—.” Before Shaw can finish his sentence, however, Cypher interrupts him: “Excuse me. Small point that needs to be made. Krakoa is alive. Not a place, or a biome—a person. Fauna, not flora. So I’d be careful how hard you lean into the whole property rights thing.” In this panel, Cypher is juxtaposed with the other Quiet Council members to stark effect, revealing the obvious difference in their relationships with the island. Whereas all of the other council members are sitting in fabricated chairs with hard lines, Cypher lazily reclines in a bed of soft foliage, showing both his connection with and representation of Krakoa as its only translator.

In the next panel, another council member, Storm, settles the notion, claiming, “But the idea of home comes with possession baked into it, doesn’t it? Perhaps if you want to own a place, it has to be...out there. In the world.” This exchange is interesting in that it reveals three things. The first is that some mutants cling to human notions’ of property ownership. Even in the Krakoan nation, where all mutants are treated equally, some mutants desire economic gain over others. The second is that the voice of the interpreter for Krakoa—the one who understands it better than anyone—is quick to remind Shaw that Krakoa is unwilling to accept anyone’s ownership of a piece

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of itself. It should be noted here that since Cypher first appeared in *New Mutants # 13* (1984), he has generally been portrayed as timid and insecure because his power is more passive than other X-Men's more overtly physical powers. Contrarily, Sabastian Shaw has been consistently portrayed as an arrogant and aggressive villain since his first appearance in *Uncanny X-Men #129* (1980). The idea that Cypher would not only speak up, but also interrupt Shaw in the middle of a sentence, shows his insistence that Krakoa does not approve of Shaw's proposal. The third notable observation is that Storm dismisses the idea quickly, suggesting that if mutants want to own property, then they should buy it outside of Krakoa. Considering that Storm's powers (controlling the weather) are attuned to nature, her statement leaves the reader to wonder, "Is she worried that Krakoa will retaliate against mutants for continuing to entertain Shaw's idea?" Although nothing in this dialogue suggests that Krakoa would do such a thing, its history in Marvel Comics has provided ample evidence that it can be powerful and destructive if it so chooses.⁶

Whether or not Krakoa would actually retaliate is irrelevant to the Quiet Council's fear that it might, reflecting their subconscious knowledge of nature's sublimity. This exchange underlines the material reality that, despite the mutants' use of Krakoan habitats for their own means, the island itself controls their property entirely, leaving them with no true claim to the land or the habitats in which they reside. In essence, their shelters are at the whim of their environment, which controls them absolutely.

The aforementioned examples highlight the ways that ecocriticism underlines Krakoa's agency, as the environment that it provides—that it is—dictates practically every aspect of the new mutant country. Delving further into ecocriticism, particularly ecofeminism, also foregrounds the ways that the Krakoan environment helps mutants deviate from stereotypical representations of men and women in *House of X*. Such stereotypes often position society and masculinity in opposition to the environment, leading to the en-

vironment's destruction (Warren 2000, Heis 2008). Other theories highlight the longstanding association between women and nature, as explained by Karla Armbuster: "yet another dualism: an uncomplicated opposition between women's perceived unity with nature and male-associated culture's alienation from it" (Armbuster 98). Claudia von Werlhof builds on Armbuster's ideas, claiming that capitalism in and of itself assumes a deep-rooted patriarchy and male hegemony. She further asserts that man's quest for technology is unbridled in his pursuit of wealth and power in capitalism (Werlhof 2007). In short, the idea of nature as feminine and progress as masculine permeates—and to our knowledge, predates—literature. However, Jonathan Hickman demonstrates that all mutants are equal on Krakoa, as their functions in society are dictated by their powers rather than their genders.

In some instances, readers do see male characters associated with progress in the form of technology. For example, Mr. Sinister, a mutant geneticist, is shown in his bar, which is rife with monitors and mechanical devices; and Forge, a mutant builder, is tasked with building a machine that can store every mutant's memory. However, these representations are rife with more contradictions than consistencies, especially in consideration of the various roles that some of mutants ultimately play in the larger narrative.

The most apparent example of such a figure is Cypher. Even though Cypher is a computer genius and has a "techno-organic" alien living on his arm, he is obviously more closely connected to the environment of Krakoa than any other mutant. Similarly, the mutant Apocalypse, whose entire body consists of technological armor that bends to his will, is often shown in a floral garden of Krakoa—especially in a subsequent title, *Excalibur Vol. 4*. Conversely, female mutants such as White Queen and the Stepford Cuckoos are relegated to settings that are unnatural, such as in a courthouse, in an embassy that is only partially floral, or at the Quiet Council table.

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In all of these examples, the women are gathering intelligence, giving orders, and dictating the state of affairs outside of Krakoa. In Krakoa, stereotypical male hegemony is uprooted as male and female characters are depicted in environments that coincide with their missions and/or powers rather than by their gender identities. It is also noteworthy that in the disagreement between Sebastian Shaw and Krakoa, the female character, Storm, lays the debate between two male mutants to rest by asserting that any mutant looking to own land—or partake in traditional capitalist ventures—should do so outside of the Krakoan nation. In this incident, Storm asserts her power while rejecting a patriarchal, capitalist system that Shaw seems to embrace because he is an upper-class, white man, as opposed to Storm, who is an African woman.⁷

Pepe Lazzar's and R.B. Silva's visual depiction of female mutants reflects the strength that they demonstrate in Jonathan Hickman's narrative and dialogue. Rather than running the risk of masculinizing these female characters, Lazzar and Silva gender the mutant women's wardrobes and retain the characters' femininity without hypersexualizing them (May 2015).⁸ Such is the case with White Queen and Marvel Girl. In many of White Queen's appearances since her first appearance in 1980, the character is dressed in a white leather corset with white bikini bottoms (or a white leather teddy), white patent-leather thigh-high stilettos, and a white cape. Rather than dressing her in her traditional regalia, however, Lazzar and Silva depict the White Queen in either a white suit or in a dress and a white cape. These updated looks reflect her discriminating taste and power with high fashion rather than sexual fetish. Contrarily, Lazzar and Silva revert to Marvel Girl's original costume, de-fetishizing her appearance. For all of her appearances in *House of X*, Marvel Girl is clad in her original 1960s mod minidress—complete with belt and three-quarter length sleeves—rather than the form-fitting, spandex catsuit in which she has been depicted for years. Both characters' wardrobes in *House of X* are irrefutably (traditionally) feminine and simultaneously reaffirm the women's gender without objectifying them.

Their clothes, and the clothes shown on other female mutants, do separate them from the male mutants, who tend to keep their form-fitting spandex and leather hero outfits. However, even though genders are designated by the clothes that the mutants wear, their roles in the story reflect their equality to one another. Moreover, even though the artists gender mutants, that gender does not determine a connection to or disconnect from nature. *House of X* shows both male and female characters who live in the community and/or defend the Krakoan environment, thus reaffirming the equality of all mutants living on Krakoa.

When *X-Men Vol. 5* ended, Marvel Comics promised that mutants would never be the same in their pages. *House of X* made good on this promise, but not by re-booting the universe as Marvel had done numerous times in the past couple of decades. This time, Marvel introduced a drastic philosophical shift in its champion mutant team, the X-Men. Historically, X-Men comics had been sympathetic to human rights movements, starting with civil rights in the 1960s (Shyminsky 2006, Darowski 2014). The X-Men have served as an allegory for the struggles of marginalized humans in society, but they have also reflected the philosophies of peaceful protest espoused by leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. In *House of X*, however, the mutants adopt a separatist philosophy, establishing their own nation that only humans can access. Readers see X-Men aligning with their enemies, and in doing so, adopting more surreptitious and emboldened tactics to cajole humanity into recognizing the sovereignty of the nation of Krakoa.

Using an ecocritical lens makes apparent the extent to which none of the Krakoa's sovereignty would be possible without the environment produced by the island itself. *House of X* repeatedly demonstrates that every aspect of society—and even living—is dictated Krakoa's will. Being designated as a mutant itself, Krakoa is tolerant and accommodating of its mutant inhabitants, but it does have its limits. Various incidents throughout the story show that Krakoa will discriminate against potential occupants by denying them access through one of its teleportation gates,

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or by making the seas around it too turbulent to navigate. It also refuses to allow anyone to claim ownership on its land; instead, it permits mutants to use its land and live in its habitats whether or not they are located on the island itself. This environment's ability to directly and consciously control its resources is unique in science fiction, particularly in comic books. Although the entire *House of X* storyline indicates that mutants feel comfortable with Krakoa, the environment could literally change on a whim.

The story ends on a high note, so to speak. The mutants are having a party to celebrate their victory and independence, enemies and frenemies are sharing beers, and mutants with light/explosive powers are firing them into the air like fireworks. Perhaps what is most unique about *House of X* is not that it changed the X-Men forever—a promise made by comic book writers at least once a year—or how it finally gave mutants the safe-haven for which they had been searching for years, but in how it promoted the environment to the forefront of the story. For the first time, a major story arc in the X-Men universe is completely reliant on the environment itself rather than the mutants and their spectacular powers. One would be hard-pressed to argue that *House of X* can truly be appreciated or even criticized without viewing it through an ecocritical lens. Such a lens illuminates how necessary it is for the mutant nation to respect and understand Krakoa, to become a part of it rather than apart from it, and to recognize all that it does for them in this story. Without this respect and understanding, their existence and new found sovereignty could be taken from them in an instant.

Notes

¹ Because *House of X* and *Powers of X* were published concurrently as parts of the same storyline,

this article uses “House of X” to refer to both series unless a specific issue is referenced.

² Marvel distinguishes the difference between humans as *Homo sapiens* and mutants as *Homo superior*, a separate species; however, for the sake of argument, mutants in Marvel Comics tend to be portrayed as almost indistinguishable from humans in their thoughts and speech.

³ These topics are the clear focus of story arcs such as “Days of Future Past” (1981), *God Loves, Man Kills* (1982), “X-Tinction Agenda” (1990), and *House of M* (2005).

⁴ Krakoa is technically listed as a member of the Quiet Council, with Cypher as its translator.

⁵ The Stepford Cuckoos (Cuckoos) are identical, dress the same, and share “hive mind,” so unless the author designates which one is speaking by name, it is unlikely that the reader can distinguish between them.

⁶ In *Giant Sized X-Men #1*, Krakoa defeated and fed off of the X-Men.

⁷ Originally, Shaw has held the affluent rank of “Black King” in a mutant-controlled investment group called “The Hellfire Club.” In the Hellfire Club, Shaw was responsible for all of its black-market dealings. On Krakoa, he is placed as second in command of “Hellfire Trade Company,” which controls all of Krakoa's imports and exports.

⁸ The author recognizes modern definitions of gender but refers to the mutant population on Krakoa in binary terms because the prominent characters of the story identify as male and female.

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